

Please reply to:



July 7, 1995

By Registered Mail

Mr. Charles E. Pascal
Deputy Minister
Ministry of Education and Training
Mowat Block
Queen's Park
Toronto, ON
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Dear Mr. Pascal:

Thank you for your undated letter received June 23, 1995. Unfortunately, it does not address the concerns raised, let alone resolve them. Aside from the issue of an exceptionality grouping for environmental sensitivities, we asked for the following questions:

1. How will the Ministry of Education and Training undo damages being caused by pejorative materials distributed by the Ministry?
2. What consumer groups did the Special Education Advisory Council consult with prior to making their negative recommendations? and
3. Considering the abusive comments made by at least one Council member, when will the Ministry appoint the Allergy and Environmental Health Association to the Advisory Council?

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Your letter gives the impression that it is only health-related needs that arise as a result of environmental sensitivities. It ignores the unique learning and behavioral problems sensitivities cause in some children.

One wonders whether you, or Jill Hutcheon, who signed the letter, are giving these issues careful consideration. For instance, in the second paragraph of the letter you state "Knowing your organization's position..." when one of the concerns is that the Ministry and the Advisory Council obviously did not know AEHA's position.

The Ministry says that the exceptionality groupings are needs based. None of the other groupings describe the needs of children with environmental sensitivities. Confusion in the Ministry as demonstrated by the write-up in the "Categories of Exceptionalities and Definitions" distributed by the Ministry and the abuse perpetrated in some school boards indicates that it is extremely important to have these children in a specific grouping, so that other, potentially damaging methods are not used on them. If it truly is the Ministry's position that their needs are met through other groupings, we'd like you to describe how.

In paragraph three of your letter, you indicate that "the Council recommended that the Ministry of Education and Training include the term in the consultation package to obtain additional input". This hardly reflects the pejorative tone of the materials widely distributed. It ignores the fact that the process was highly prejudiced, not only by the Advisory Council's negative recommendation, but also by the misconceptions communicated in the "Definitions" document distributed to school boards, etc.

Council and the Ministry grossly prejudiced the outcome of the process by presenting a misleading representation of environmental sensitivities and their relationship to health needs and learning and behavioral exceptionalities. The incessant case-making by Ministry staff that sensitivities should not be included as an exceptionality grouping indicates clearly that their minds are made up. It would appear that in addition to making a negative recommendation, the Ministry has also made a final

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decision without consultation, based on hugely prejudicial information, reportedly from obviously biased members of the Council. Everything your staff has said seems intended to defend a position they have already taken.

We are also concerned to have been invited to attend a meeting under false pretenses. The meeting was described by Ministry staff to be for the purpose of coming up with an exceptionality descriptor for environmental sensitivities and to work on a means of undoing the harm being caused by pejorative materials distributed by the Ministry. Then, at the meeting, we were told that Ministry staff had no intention of putting forward a recommendation that sensitivities be an exceptionality grouping. No effort has been made to reverse the damage being caused by the materials distributed.

The Advisory Council arrived at a recommendation without consulting consumers. A pejorative recommendation was distributed extensively to school boards and parent associations, accompanied by misconceptions about what sensitivities are. Staff agreed that harm may have been done by distributing a negative recommendation. Nothing has been done to undo the damage, either to this process or in general, caused by the negative recommendation. A meeting was proposed under false pretenses. Staff constantly defend the notion that there should not be an exceptionality grouping for sensitivities, while claiming the process is open. We receive a letter from a Deputy Minister that does not address the concerns being raised.

We should be assured?

We would be assured if the Ministry learned what sensitivities are, what the health needs are, and how they can affect behaviour and learning. We would be assured if the Advisory Council passed a motion indicating that they would not make recommendations without consulting the people affected. We would be assured if the Ministry distributed materials to undo the damage being caused by the materials distributed so far. We would be assured if AEHA were given a seat on the Advisory Council. We would be

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assured if the legislation included environmental sensitivities as an exceptionality grouping.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Stutt
Vice President and National Education Chair
Allergy and Environmental Health Association of Canada
